

Optimism

Optimism is a style of adapting to a situation that follows from the belief that when one has an effect of achieving one's desired goal. It is a set of skills on how to talk to oneself when a setback has occurred. When people do badly, they ask themselves, "why?"

There are three components to the answer to this question:

Who is to blame?

How much of life will be undermined?

How long will it last?

The first question attaches blame to the self or world.

The second and third questions how pervasive the cause is and how permanent is the cause - govern what people do to respond to failure.

Optimists employ an explanatory style in which they think the bad event is temporary, limited to a specific event, and with many possible causes other than themselves.

Listed are 3 critical dimensions used to explain why any particular good or bad event happens are personal, permanent, and pervasive.

Internal versus external: Personal.

When events happen, children either blame themselves (internal) or they blame circumstances or other people (external). Thus, children need to learn to take appropriate responsibility for events that occur in their lives.

Sometimes versus always: Permanent.

Pessimistic and depressed children believe the cause of bad events and failure is permanent. Optimistic children believe causes for bad events are temporary. This inoculates them against depression. See *PPP.

Specific versus global: Pervasive:

Pessimistic and depressed children tend to let a bad situation expand into all parts of their lives. Instead of test failure meaning, "I am stupid", children can learn to say "I didn't prepare very well this time."

Basic Skills of Optimism

Thought catching. Catch the thought and change it.

Evaluation. Evaluate automatic and habitual thoughts and test their validity rather than believe them as "truths."

Accurate explanations. Develop accurate explanation to challenge automatic thoughts.

Decatastrophizing. Ruminating on potential terrible implications and the worst possible consequences creates frustration, drains energy and interferes with correcting problems.

*PPP. Penn Prevention Program. Seligman, M.E.P. (1995). *The Optimistic Child: A revolutionary program that safeguards children against depression and builds lifelong resilience*. New York: Houghton Mills.

This summary taken from: *At Risk Youth: A Comprehensive Response For Counselors, Teachers, Psychologists, and Human Service Professionals*. 3rd ed. McWhirter, J. et al. Chapter 13 pp. 248-250.

United States: Thomson Brooks/Cole.